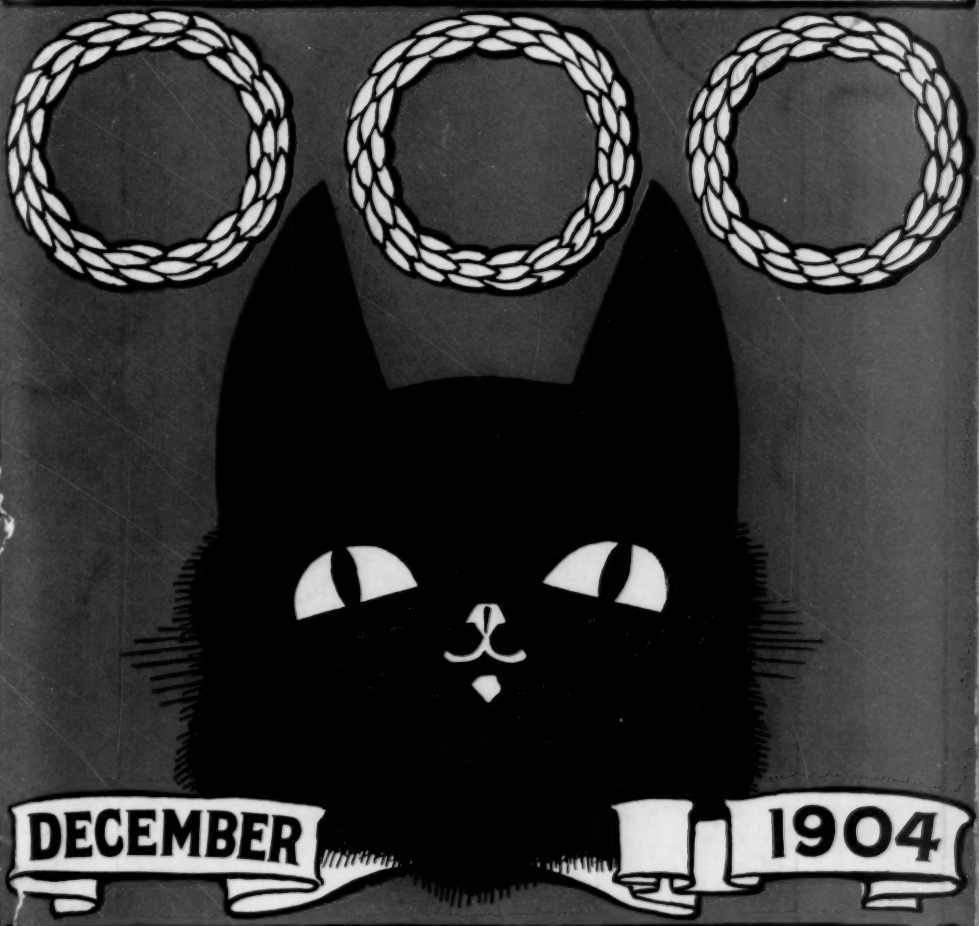
# The Black Cat



DECEMBER 1904

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# The Black Cat

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## Range Light Number Thirteen.*

BY NATHANIEL DICKINSON.

WINSTON CARLTON had met and known Lord Stowbridge in Paris, and now he rose quickly from his office chair to take His Lordship's hand and make him welcome — as in the fable the viper was warmed.

Soldierly, as always, Stowbridge looked that morning — tall and dark and slender, with the dark hair and eyes of his mother, the daughter of a Spanish grandee. Already about his temples the gray was gathering, and his high, narrow forehead, of peculiar shape, told a story of violent temper and arrogant pride. What His Lordship was doing fifty miles up a New England river Carlton could not imagine, but he was not left long in doubt.

"I have run up from New York in my sea-going steam yacht, the *Isabel*, to see you on business," said his visitor.

Sipping the brandy and soda provided by his host, Lord Stowbridge told of his proposed scheme, which Carlton thought that of a visionary — one more worthy of a novel-reading schoolboy than of a peer of the British realm. He did not see that beneath it lay a carefully planned and eminently feasible project which, rather than aid, he would have cut off his hand.

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"I am about to make a cruise in South American waters, Carlton," he said. "I shall run up the Amazon and some of its larger tributaries, partly to hunt big game, partly for scientific purposes. In the natural order of things, I expect to have to show my teeth at times, between the uncivilized tribes and the even worse scum of degenerate civilization. I have aboard the *Isabel* scientific apparatus of great value, plate, and other personal property — virtually my entire property. You know I am not one of your American billionaires, and I intend that no lack of precaution shall deprive me of what I have. In fine, I want an armament and, remembering our pleasant friendship and your position as head of one of the largest firearm concerns in the world, I have come straight to you for it."

It was during our war with Spain, all arms factories were working day and night, and even then Carlton's orders were behind. He saw disappointment ahead for his English friend, but mechanically inquired what he needed. Stowbridge named a list of small-arms and machine guns that would have fitted out a small cruiser.

"My dear Sir!" he exclaimed, "Your Lordship has named enough guns to restock the Spanish navy!"

Instead of laughing, the British peer grew red in the face, and Carlton hastily apologized, though why his remark should have caused any offence he could not guess. He explained at length the impossibility of filling such an order, at least for three months.

"That would be fatal to my scheme" the Englishman declared, and Carlton wondered. "At least, my dear Carlton," he said, as he rose to go, "you will come aboard the *Isabel* this evening, and dine with us?"

"With us?" echoed Carlton. "It cannot be that Benedict has ——"

"No, no," interrupted Stowbridge rather hastily, but without a smile at the suggestion. "My daughter — I believe you did not meet her in Paris."

"I shall be delighted!" exclaimed Carlton, but, without a parting salutation, his visitor was gone.

It was near seven o'clock that evening when Carlton's waterman brought him alongside the Englishman's yacht. She had caught his eye from the moment of embarkation, for she was the largest

pleasure craft on the river, and had the bow and stern of a warship. Indeed, the likeness to one of the larger gunboats of our navy struck him forcibly.

Stowbridge himself met his visitor at the head of the padded steps and showed him over the beautiful steamer. From keel to truck, from stem to stern, she was neat as a man-of-war. Her decks were holystoned to polished whiteness, her brasswork shone golden in the twilight and, in spite of her sea voyage, her paint looked as fresh as if it had been put on the day before.

The nature of Carlton's business had brought him a very fair knowledge of warships and their complements, and he noted that, although only one watch was on deck, yet there were twice the number of men usual on a pleasure craft of her size. "His Lordship means to give the South Americans their fill of fighting" he mused, and yet he wondered at the great proportion of Latins in the crew.

Having taken Carlton over the ship, Stowbridge led him down to the dining-saloon, where his admiration for its appointments was cut short by the entrance of Inez Stowbridge. The American knew himself to be a hard, practical man of affairs — a man beyond any petty susceptibility to feminine charms, as he supposed, yet he knew from the moment his eyes rested on this girl that there was something in her that would prove irresistible.

Dark she was, and more of a Spaniard in looks than His Lordship. Of medium height, yet so perfect the contour of her slender figure, she seemed of dignified stature. Her face, with its clear olive skin, its piling masses of blue-black hair, its carnation lips, and, dominating all, its great, lustrous eyes, which seemed to have in their depths something of mystery that was not of earth, fascinated Carlton. His very soul seemed to quiver as he looked into those eyes, and for a moment he stood as a fool beneath their charm. Stowbridge presented him. He mumbled an incoherent something, realizing nothing but that her voice was in harmony with the rest of her superb being. Of that meal, sumptuous as it was, he remembered nothing definite. His thoughts of all resolved themselves into one thing — those great dark eyes, now cold as Andalusian fountains, now sparkling with the warmth of human passion, which sat across from him. It

seemed to him that a new world, a world he had not dreamed of, was opening slowly before him as he caught their fleeting glance from time to time during that short dinner.

She seemed haughty, yet gracious, and the dazzle of her smile left him fairly gasping for breath. Beautiful, as the Devil alone can make beauty, she was, and he a fit moth for such a candle.

After that dinner the three sat under an awning on deck, the girl listening, while Stowbridge rehearsed his hopes and plans, and Carlton answered only in monosyllables, when a direct question was put. It seemed to him that he could sit there forever and drink in, through the dimness of the night, the subtle charm of the girl beside him, as delicate and elusive as the Oriental perfume wafted to him from her from time to time by the cool night air. Occasionally she would smile at some remark, and her dazzling teeth gleamed white, in brilliant contrast to the dusky hair and face.

The night was conducive to sentiment. The dark, silent river flowing past, the cool night breeze, so light that it seemed but a freshness to the nostrils, the indistinct outlines of the lounging forms of the watch, forward — all these combined with the newly awakened, subtle something in Carlton's being to make him forget for the time the cares and responsibilities of life and live among the lotus-eaters.

He came back to earth with a start. Lord Stowbridge had arisen and was addressing him: "So you don't think you can help us with those arms," he was saying.

"I am very sorry," the gunmaker replied, "but I fear not. As I said, we can't fill the orders on hand, and, when we can, we often have not means of transportation to the nearest naval station, which means holding things up."

"Then you have the arms in stock?" queried Stowbridge, almost sharply.

"Yes and no," Carlton replied. "For instance, in two weeks, providing that everything goes smoothly in the works, we will have ready a consignment for New York much the same as the one you desire, and we are already incurring a daily forfeit that has eaten off the profits of the deal. But even at that, when it is ready I am at a loss to know how we shall get it down to New

York, for all the river steamers are sold to be used as gunboats in Cuban waters, and there is a railroad freight tie-up threatened."

"Ah," said Stowbridge thoughtfully, "I seem to be 'up against it,' as you Americans put it. He made no further allusion to the subject the rest of the evening.

When Carlton left, Inez gave him her hand. It seemed to him that a great wave of sympathy surged through it to his very heart's blood and bereft him of speech. He stammered over it like some overgrown schoolboy, and left half-unanswered the nobleman's cordial invitation to come aboard again any time.

"I mean to hang around a week or so, and I shall expect you to amuse Inez and myself," he said.

The following two weeks constituted for Carlton a round of short runs in the yacht and dashes about country in his car, of moonlight evenings on the water — and of business sadly neglected. He was a man who, having set his mind on a thing, concentrated all his energies to obtain it. At the end of a week he would have sold his hope of salvation at the bidding of a woman unknown to him ten days before, and this she knew, while of her own feelings he knew no more than he had on the night they met.

Had the manufacturer been in possession of half his senses, he must have seen something to wonder at in the Englishman's actions. At times when Carlton was talking with the girl the eyes of the men would meet, and those of Stowbridge would startle the other with the venom of hate which seemed to lurk in their depths. Yet, at their next meeting, his hand-grip would be as hearty, and his urbane smile without a trace of dislike. Often he listened with what, infatuated as Carlton was, he could not but see was cold distaste to the conversation of the other two, almost openly resenting at times the man's advances toward the girl, and then, again, he would leave them for long intervals alone in each other's company, seemingly almost by design. Carlton did not know what to make of it. At one time he would imagine that the possibility of his daughter marrying an untitled foreigner went against His Lordship's grain, and at another that he was attracted by the American's great wealth, and desired that very thing to be brought about. Altogether, he was an enigma to the firearms manufacturer.

On the last evening of the stay of the Stowbridges up-river, Carlton went aboard the yacht. On the following afternoon they were to leave, and this was to be a farewell visit. "Was it?" Carlton asked himself. He decided that at least he would try his fate.

They sat under the awning as they had that first evening, and, as that charm which always stole over him in the girl's presence came upon him, Carlton told himself that he had always known her, always would, and that to-morrow was but a dream, and a bad one. It was already late when he arrived, but the waning moon had just risen, and the river was swathed in a mantle of shimmering beauty. Silver-shot wavelets stretched in the moon's light to the shadowy banks, and waxen-leaved poplars sent their rustling murmur down the soft night breeze. Dimly outlined, the New England hills rose in the distance on either side of the river, like a land of myths and fairies.

But to the man, the girl's face, standing out against the soft light of the moon, framed in shining masses of hair, with here and there a seductive hanging wisp, shadowed all the other beauties of nature, and left him for the time gazing and dreaming in perfect contentment.

Harsh, then, as the rasp of a saw, sounded the voice of Stowbridge: "About that consignment of arms of yours," he was saying. "You lack the means of transportation for them, you say. I was about to suggest that, as I am dropping down to New York before I go across, it would be a simple matter for me to accommodate you by taking them down, and so repay to some extent your hospitality. I have an empty hold, you know."

Carlton jumped to his feet with a genuine expression of relief. This government contract, on which he was incurring daily a large forfeiture, was the one business affair that he had allowed to worry him of late.

"Why, Stowbridge," he exclaimed, gratefully, taking the nobleman's hand, "you don't know what a load it will take off my mind. I am a thousand times obliged to you."

"Not at all, a mere nothing," replied the other hastily, returning the grasp, but Carlton afterwards remembered that the hand he held had trembled like a leaf. "I believe I'll leave you young

folks now," he continued almost benignly. "This night air doesn't seem to agree with me. *Au revoir* until to-morrow. Of course you'll come to see us off?"

With more warmth than he had ever felt toward the peer, Carlton assured him that he would, and Stowbridge went below.

The girl had not said a word, not even "good-night," and for the first time it struck the American that, often as he had seen the two together, not once had he seen the girl display any filial affection by voice or manner.

Now her voice interrupted his thoughts. She was gazing somewhat pensively out over the moonlit waters. "What," she mused, "is there in moonlight on the water which is at once so sweet and sad, which makes one live in dreamland for the time, yet be denied the oblivion to the fact that there must be an awakening?"

The soft charm of her voice would have robbed the most commonplace remark of its triteness.

"Perhaps," said Carlton, gravely, sitting down beside her, "there are some happy dreams that have no awakening."

"Ah," she said, "what joy! But — impossible. And then," she added lightly, "there are nightmares, you know. What if one might never awake from such?"

Carlton looked for some hidden meaning in the words, but apparently they were innocent of duplicity.

"I had not dared to think of that," he replied deliberately; "I was in search of the other."

"Do you wish the moon?" she taunted.

"No," he replied fervently; "only two stars which sparkle more brilliantly."

"Is that all?" she inquired innocently.

Her subtle beauty stole over his senses, the breath of her delicate perfume came to his nostrils, the lovely features seemed so near. Somewhere within him waked the primal man. She was his by right of might, he told himself.

She turned. The moonlight shone full upon her glorious face, her dazzling white neck and shoulders. Tears seemed to glisten in the dark depths of her eyes.

"My God," said Carlton, hoarsely, trying to tear himself from her fascination, "you must not do that."

She did not reply, but her eyes still held his. And then he forgot everything that he should have remembered. He caught her and crushed her to him. He covered her face, her lips, with kisses. If she protested, he did not know it in his passion. They were alone. Her struggles were as nothing to him. The dark masses of her hair he felt against his forehead. He drank in the beauty of her face until his brain reeled, and then — in a moment — what he had done flashed upon him, and his arms dropped limply to his sides. The girl stepped back. For a moment she stood silent. The tears were still in her eyes.

"Can you forgive me?" Carlton pleaded. Something in her attitude gave him new courage. "I love you," he said passionately. "Will you marry me?"

Slowly, tenderly, he could have sworn almost lovingly, she shook her head.

"I cannot," she said, so low that it seemed to Carlton that his answer had come without words. She turned and left him there.

All the following day his men rushed the consignment of arms aboard the *Isabel*, where the numerous crew stowed them in her hold. Early in the morning Lord Stowbridge had had her brought alongside the arms company's wharf, but it was not until nearly six o'clock in the evening that he visited her. To Carlton, the day had been one long attempt to fully realize his situation, to logically reason out the events of the previous evening, and come to a definite plan of action for the future. His mind was in a fog, a whirl of conflicting emotions. At last, apathetically, he gave it up. Beyond resolving to see the girl again, he had decided nothing.

He ran down to the dock in his Panhard. The last machine gun, the last case of rifles, were going aboard, and steam was up on the yacht. Lord Stowbridge stood on the bridge, talking with his captain. Carlton felt that he was in a somewhat peculiar position regarding him. According to the foreigner's lights, it struck the American now, he should have spoken to the father before pressing his suit on the daughter. Yet, even had he not been carried away by the passion of the moment, he doubted if he should have complied with this anti-American custom. Now, indeed, was he dully glad that he had said nothing, while he wondered if the girl had spoken of the previous evening.

His Lordship's welcome, however, dispelled any such suspicion. He came down to meet Carlton, and led him back to the bridge, where he discussed with the captain his future plans. He had cabled several of the large arms concerns, he said, and found them all in a similar situation. Under the circumstances, he would wait until this "unpleasantness" had blown over, and then would be able, without doubt, to make satisfactory arrangements concerning his armament. So they talked until the conversation reached a point where the American could safely inquire for Inez.

Stowbridge informed him, with much apparent regret, that she was quite indisposed, so much so, in fact, that she would be unable to say farewell in person, and wished to convey her thanks for the trouble Mr. Carlton had gone to in entertaining them, and her regret at not being able to see him again before their departure.

The words seemed to ring in Carlton's ears. Not see her again! He had as soon not live. He groped blindly for some loophole, some chance of a future meeting, at least, for without it the savor was gone from life.

"But I shall see you both again?" he stammered.

"Surely, my dear Carlton," answered Stowbridge; "but when, I don't know. You see, I am something of a Wandering Jew, but you will hear from me before we put to sea."

His last chance of seeing the girl again having vanished, the yacht, its owner, and everything about it suddenly seemed hateful to Carlton. A fever of impatience to be away from it, to shake the very thought of it from his aching brain, came upon him. Abruptly he took his leave of Stowbridge, got into his car, and shot off, noting as he did so that the last lines were being taken aboard the yacht and the dock hands were all leaving her, and then resolutely he turned his eyes from the craft and blindly gave the car its highest speed.

The wild pace soothed him. The rush of the cool evening air partially drove the fever from his head, and when, a half-hour later, he looked down on the river from a hill on the farther side of the city, a sudden pang of regret struck him that he had not waited in a last hope of seeing the girl's face again. He turned back toward the city. He would run down to the wharf. Possibly they might be still in sight.

But this was a vain hope, for when he pulled up on the dock again neither boat nor human being was to be seen, the place was deserted. Night was falling. A sadness which he could not repress stole over him. He started to turn the car around, when he caught sight of a watchman coming around the corner of a building. He came forward, holding something up in his hand.

"A letter for you, sir," he said.

"Whom from?" asked Carlton, eagerly.

"Him as owned the yacht, sir."

The ardent lover's spirits fell. He had hoped it from another.

"Any word?" he asked.

"No, sir," was the reply. "He asked me if you ever came down evenings, and I said you didn't, sir. Then he said as how I was to give you this in the morning, and not until then, but I guess it's all right," he added doubtfully.

"Yes, it's all right," said Carlton, curtly, opening the letter and ordering the man to hold his lantern while he read.

The first words puzzled him, and then gradually the perfidy of the writer dawned upon him, and he saw his emotions reflected in the surprise of the lantern bearer. This is what he read: —

> *My dear Carlton,*— My wife and I regret the necessity of departing without thanking you for so kindly providing the *Isabel* with the armament necessary for our cherished object, that of providing His Majesty of Spain with a new converted cruiser. Circumstances prevented us from extending those thanks, which we now do. By the time you receive this, we will be far out at sea, but even then the blood of my Spanish mother, of my Spanish wife, and of all good compatriots of theirs and mine will not cease to cry out its thanks to the kind American. Let not your sense of duty to your country detract from the pleasure of having gratified the dearest wish of your whilom friends,
>
> LORD AND LADY STOWBRIDGE.

Carlton's mind was a blank for the next few moments. Then, above his conflicting emotions, stood out one which gradually crowded out all others — hate — hate which asked for blood, and would not be satisfied with less.

He was conscious of an utter carelessness of life. To him there was no future, no ambition, no object in life, but this one — revenge. Strange as it may seem, the very strength and singleness of his hate cleared his brain. Deliberately he thought the situation over. He might telegraph to the small town at

the mouth of the river, and have the yacht stopped at the draw, but then, no doubt, the desperate adventurer would capture the bridge and have his own men swing it. Even should he submit to being stopped, there was the slow-turning wheels of official action, the paucity of evidence, the difficulty of conviction, and, lastly, the inadequacy to Carlton of any punishment which the law might inflict upon these traitors to him. No, this punishment must be administered by *him*, by him alone, if he would attain his end.

While these thoughts ran rapidly through his mind, he realized that he had been staring fixedly at a red range-light, far down the river, and following fast came the realization of the possibilities which this light suggested. He could have cried out in joy at the thought that sprang into his head. All along the stream, at the more intricate reaches of the channel, were placed these lights, sometimes in sets of two, sometimes of three. Once brought in vertical alignment by the pilot of a boat, he is safely in the channel, but let him vary as much as a few feet in certain places, and he will pile his craft on some hidden bar, or tear a hole in her bow on some jagged rock, of which there are many scattered along the river bottom.

Ah, that would be the way, — to shift one of those lights! Yet even this seemed unsatisfying in its coldness. He longed for the physical touch, the rending and tearing with his very hands! What would he not give to have the traitor Stowbridge by the throat, and slowly choke the life out of him! Surely, humanity is but little higher than the beast, let once the superficialities of life and the constraint of habit be removed by some great passion.

Once this plan had taken root in his brain, Carlton whirled the car about and shot off in the darkness. Dimly he remembered afterward how he sped through the lighted city, with here and there an officer of the law running after him, waving in helpless indignation his night-stick as the car shot by without the touch of a lever. How the city gave way to ill-lighted country roads, and then to roads that were not lighted at all. Once he stopped, and in feverish haste lighted the Panhard's powerful headlights, and a minute later was tearing on again. Well for him that he knew the river road over which he went, for never once did he

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touch lever for the first fifteen or twenty miles. Dizzily down hills plunged the car, swept through the damp coolness of valleys, fought its way up hill again, and roared along the levels. Its song soothed its driver, the regularity of its staccato explosions was music to his ear, for it spoke of a foe to be overtaken, and the sweep of lights ahead gave him a strange sense of being more than flesh and bone — a messenger of Fate and Death.

Once, as he tore down hill in the darkness of the starless night, a form sprang from the road before him, and, before he could move hand, the on-rushing machine had struck it and hurled it to one side, he knew not whether living or dead. He felt no emotions of pity for the apparently drunken wretch — indeed, he cursed back at him for smashing a lamp, and leaving him but one to light him over the ever-growing hills of the river road.

For long stretches at a time the highway ran in sight of the stream, which lay black below it. On one of these stretches he hoped to pick up the stern light of the *Isabel*. Nearly fifty miles she would have to put behind her, from the time she cast off her moorings to the time when the last barrier of the river — the draw-bridge — was passed at its mouth. To do this, Carlton allowed her four hours, for she would hardly dare run full speed in the night, with all the dangers of an intricate channel to contend with, and with no expectation of pursuit.

For himself, Carlton counted on making the distance, which was a few miles shorter by road, in half that time. The yacht had nearly two hours the start of him, but already more than half the distance was behind him, and he had been on the road but an hour.

Something like contempt now mingled with his hate of the man he pursued when he thought of how he had let personal animosity and the pleasure of writing a scathing note ruin so well-laid a scheme. He felt that he had the foe in his power, for, at the rate he was going, he could not fail to overhaul the yacht long before it reached the sea, and he had faith to believe that he could decoy it to its doom.

The strong south breeze was already tinged with the scent of brine, and the hills were giving way to the more level country of the seashore when at last, rounding a bend in the road, he

caught the glint of the white light which shone from the *Isabel's* stern. At first it seemed stationary, but as he rapidly overtook it, the yacht swung around another bend, and again the river was innocent of any light. And then, as he brought this other stretch of the stream into view, he caught the glare of the cabin lights along with that of the stern, and any doubt of the vessel's identity was gone. A grim satisfaction stole over him. He shook his fist at the distant craft, and inwardly cursed her owner. As for the woman, he dared not think of her, such was the bitter gall he tasted at the memory of her perfidy.

The road leaving the river, he again lost sight of the yacht, and when next he came in view of the stream, the *Isabel* lay below him, and he saw the green eye of her starboard side-light. There was no question but that he was passing her.

But now the sea was not far off. A last hill lay between the pursuer and the sight of it, and beyond this hill lay the last range-lights above the draw-bridge. The road was heavy now with sand, and it seemed to Carlton that the *Isabel* had increased her speed. Yet, as the moments flew, her broadside lights merged into one behind him, and the white light on her bow, with the green one to starboard, seemed to swing inshore, until his last glimpse of her, as he swept over the top of the last hill, included a twinkle of red from her port light, which told him that he had at last put her well behind.

The Panhard rocked and swayed down hill and out upon the level beyond. A half-mile, and the first range-light sprang into view beside the road, which here lay close to the river. But it was the second — No. 13 — that he wanted. It was situated but a few hundred feet beyond the first. When opposite the light, Carlton brought the car to a standstill, and jumped to the ground. He groaned as his cramped limbs cracked with pain, but he did not pause an instant. He half sprang, half fell over a rail fence, fought his way through a jungle of bush and brier, until he stood beside the standard which held the red lantern. He unhooked it from its bracket, carried it toward the river a yard, two yards, five — and then, with the ingenuity born of desperation, placed it on his head and stood thus, as motionless as a statue.

It seemed to him an age — it could not have been five minutes

—before the *Isabel* swept around the bend above. Many thoughts surged through his bursting brain. Would the pilot, trusting more to his knowledge of the river than to the lights, refuse to follow them? Had he moved the light far enough in case the helmsman trusted them? Would the yacht run her stem on the ragged ledges which lay in the river, or would she veer enough to slide up on a mud-bar, and get off with the rising tide? Curiously enough, it came to Carlton now for the first time that he was to bring about the death of more than one, in all probability, besides those whom he wished to destroy, and a sudden qualm of conscience struck him. But only for a second. They were all enemies of his country. The King of Spain should lose a cruiser. Black hate surged in again, and drove out all else but revenge.

So there he stood, a symbol of fate, while the *Isabel* swept on to her destruction. Her lights showed now that she was coming directly towards him, bow on. He could hear her engines. She grew swiftly in size. As in a trance he stood, fascinated. Nearer, nearer, the steamer came on, until it seemed to Carlton's disordered brain that she must run him down.

Then came a long, rending crash, a pandemonium of hissing steam, of human screams, of threshing machinery, and as the man felt himself stagger at the sight he beheld the craft totter slowly to port, and slowly sweep through an arc until she lay on her beam-ends. A burst of hissing steam blew out her starboard side. Her lights went suddenly out, and but for the sound of the horrible cries of human beings in distress, the man stood alone and dazed in the starless night.

# The Curse of Confucius.*

BY CHARLES A. BECK.

"JUST as I expected!" exclaimed Haley savagely, as the door bell rang. "Some of my kind neighbors have come to give me a pleasant evening. I suppose I never will get time to classify these coins."

Hastily brushing a pile of dirty brass and silver pieces into a box, he went, muttering, to answer the bell.

"Sir! I am hungry, and would beg a bite to eat," said a firm voice from the darkness.

Haley's brow cleared. He would rather see a half-dozen tramps than be bothered with witless neighbors.

"Anything will do, sir, I am very hungry," urged the beggar.

"Come in," said Haley, "and we will see what we can do for you. It is miserable weather to be out in, and I suppose an empty stomach doesn't make it more pleasant."

Having seated the tramp at the dining table, he once more turned his attention to his coins, while his wife placed cold meats and hot coffee before their guest.

"It must be very disagreeable walking," said Haley, without looking up.

"Yes, so it is," replied the tramp.

"I suppose you fellows get used to all kinds of weather?"

"Us fellows?" replied the tramp, bitterly. "Of course you take me for a common tramp, and — God help me — I suppose I am fast becoming one. I am having my spell of ill-luck now. I have observed that good or bad luck comes in 'bunches' — pardon the vulgarism; sometimes a year, or two years, of good luck, and then a season of nothing but bad luck. But now it seems as if my run of ill-luck will never cease."

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"You are somewhat superstitious," commented Haley.

"Superstitious? Well, maybe I am. I used to scoff at such things; but sometimes facts are brought home to a man so forcibly that he must accept them. I am a college-bred man, and at one time would have thought it impossible to reach my present state."

"I think you are wrong," said Haley, looking up, "about what you call luck. I don't believe there is any such thing. I think that it is simply an error in judgment at some time during your business career. Just like an error in chess, it may be made in the beginning, or at any time during the game, and may not be noticed by the novice; but that error may be the cause of losing the game."

"I wish I could believe as you do," replied the tramp; "but if I were to burden you with a list of my misfortunes you would readily agree that there is both good and bad luck. I see you are a coin collector. That was once my hobby. But now I am more concerned with trying to fill my stomach."

The tramp's conversation showed that he had been well educated, and the fact that he had once been a coin collector caused Haley's heart to soften; so he straightway decided to give him his last year's overcoat.

"Oh, take it along," said Haley, as the tramp mildly protested. "It will only be food for the moths if it stays here."

The tramp hesitated in the hallway as he moved toward the door, and seemed about to say something. He paused with his hand on the knob, and muttered inaudibly. Then he suddenly turned and led the way back to the dining room.

"Perhaps after all," he said, laying a small pouch on the table, "I can give you something that will pay you for your kindness. I have a very rare coin in this leather bag. It is a Chinese coin, coined during Confucius' time. It has something written on it in ancient Chinese, which no one seems able to decipher. I cannot give you the coin. It must be stolen from me. Neither must you look upon it until it is yours. Now, while I turn my back, you take it and conceal it, as if you were really stealing it."

Haley wondered at the tramp's peculiar humor; but curiosity impelled him to take the coin.

"Ah! you have it," said the tramp, with a triumphant gleam

in his eye, as he turned around. "You must admit, my friend, that 'self-preservation is the first law of nature.' I saw a chance to get rid of that coin, and I did it. I am sorry that I have had to return evil for good; but I am weak in will power from my long run of bad luck, and I would — yes, God forgive me — I would have shifted the burden on to my own mother."

"What do you mean?" asked Haley in some alarm. "Did you steal this? Will it get me into trouble?"

"Yes, I stole it, just as you have stolen it. You will not get into trouble in the ordinary way. You need not fear that anyone will claim the coin. Oh, no!" and he grinned sarcastically. "This is what you have to fear. The coin carries nothing but bad luck with it. If you can decipher what is written on the face of it, it will bring you good luck; until then, nothing but bad luck. Whoever looks upon it, and cannot read it, will also be afflicted with bad luck. The only way you can get rid of it, is to be robbed of it. If you throw it away or sell it, it will surely return to you sooner or later, in some natural manner. I will add, for good measure, that it is called the 'Curse of Confucius.'"

As the tramp talked, Haley's face gradually broadened into an incredulous grin.

"Oh, is that all!" said he. "Then I have nothing to fear. I live on bad luck signs. I always do things on Friday; always walk under ladders; and I just dote on thirteens. I see that the coin is a rare one, and it more than pays me for the coat and the supper; so, if you are satisfied, I am."

"I earnestly hope, sir," said the tramp, as he stepped into the rain, "that it will lose its power, for you have been kind to me."

Haley returned to the dining room and carefully examined the coin. It was a small brass piece, on one side of which were rudely carved, Chinese characters. He smiled as he recalled the tramp's absurd superstitions. Very likely, indeed, that that small, insignificant piece of brass could carry a curse for more than two thousand years!

Next morning, when on the way to the station, he asked the laundryman, Hop Sam, to read it. But Hop Sam could make out only one word, and that was Confucius.

He thought no more of it until he returned home that evening.

Then he was somewhat shaken by the burnt and charred front of Hop Sam's laundry.

"Merely a coincidence," he muttered. "No connection whatever with the coin."

Two weeks of bad business followed; but Haley did not lay it to the influence of the coin. He had seen dull times before, and had learned to keep on patiently waiting for the tide to turn.

One day, while down in the Chinese quarter, he thought it a good time to get an intelligent Chinaman to read the inscription. So he entered the store of a silk merchant and found the proprietor, a well-fed man, all alone.

On being asked if he understood English, he replied that he did. Haley then handed him the coin, and asked him to tell him what the characters meant. The old man glanced at it, and quickly laid it down. A look of terror came into his eyes. His face grew ashy pale. He placed one hand on his heart, and clutched with the other at his throat; then, uttering a stifled cry, he fell off his stool and lay on the floor behind the counter.

Two or three celestials, who had witnessed the old man's fall, came running in. They ran around behind the counter, and, amid much chatter, tried to get him on his feet. A passing policeman came in, and, seeing that something serious was wrong, rang for the ambulance.

Haley repeatedly assured himself that the "Curse of Confucius" had nothing to do with the old man's death — for it was plain that he was dead — but he breathed a sigh of relief when the surgeon pronounced it apoplexy.

That night he dreamed all kinds of fantastic dreams about curses, and charms, and witches; and when he awoke in the morning, superstition, which is in some degree implanted in the mind of every human being, came to the surface. He resolved to get rid of the coin. His peace of mind would be entirely destroyed if he were to carry it much longer. When he arrived at his office he threw it into a drawer in the desk, and for a while forgot it.

During the day, his partner, while rummaging in the drawer, found it, and remarked about its probable age.

Next morning he received a telephone call from Bellevue. His partner had been run over by a street car and nearly killed. It

was the first accident the man ever had had, and he had lived in New York all his life.

Haley hastened to the hospital, and found him resting easy. He had only a few broken ribs, and the doctors thought he would be out in three or four weeks.

Haley was now thoroughly convinced that the coin really possessed some mysterious, occult power — a devilish power that worked only for evil. So, notwithstanding the fact that the tramp had told him that he could not get rid of it by throwing it away, he raised his office window and hurled it with all his might over a group of smaller buildings.

Next morning he cursed himself for a fool. Burglars had broken into his house during the night, and had carried off all his valuables. If he had only kept the coin it might actually have been stolen.

Nothing serious happened during the next eight or ten days. Business got better, and everything ran along smoothly. Haley's spirits began to ascend. After all, maybe these things were all a chain of circumstances, purely accidental.

Here his optimistic train of thought was rudely broken into. He found, among a number of coins that he had bought the day before, the very coin that he had thrown away only a week or ten days previously. There it was, minus the leather pouch; and it had been returned to him, apparently by natural means. He had simply bought it with a job lot of other coins.

Once more that horrible feeling of superstitious dread came over him; this time stronger than ever. His only chance was to have it stolen or read. He would always carry it with him, and pray for someone to sand-bag him.

He made a trip to Mott Street in the hope of getting it read. He tried several intelligent looking Chinese, but without success.

At last he wandered into the store of a tea merchant. A dignified, middle-aged Chinaman came forward to attend to his wants, and, as Haley offered to pay him for his trouble, smilingly agreed to do the best he could.

He had no more than got the coin in his hand when two rough looking Chinese came in. They seemed excited, and began to talk boisterously to the proprietor of the store.

He tried to retain his dignity, but was visibly excited, and hastily returned the coin to Haley.

Haley thought that it was simply a dispute over a business transaction, and sat down on a tea box to wait until the proprietor was once more at leisure.

But when the two roughs drew knives and made a dash at the merchant he thought it about time to go, so he edged toward the door. He saw the merchant make a cat-like leap toward his desk, and next instant a revolver appeared in his hand.

Haley ran with all his speed through the door, but before he had gone many steps he heard the muffled crack of a revolver and the fall of shattered glass.

He turned into a by street and walked rapidly away. His mind was in a turmoil. What could he do? He must be rid of that coin! But how?

As he walked along it suddenly occurred to him that — barring the burglary — he himself had come to no serious harm; and he not only possessed the coin, but had looked at it many times.

He was walking along where workmen were excavating for a new building as he thought of these things, and the weightiness of the discovery brought him to a sudden stop.

As he did so, the earth gave way beneath him and he fell among mud and rock some thirty feet below.

Kind workmen restored him to consciousness, and the foreman, after assuring him that no bones were broken, admonished him in plain language, to pay more attention to signs reading DANGER.

His nerves were now all in a jangle. Twice, as he made his way to the ferry, he came near being run over by a truck or car. Then, when the ferry boat barely escaped a collision with a tug, he began to wonder if he ever would see his home again.

At last he arrived at the station, and hastened through the village toward his home. As he started across the vacant lots, he noticed, a short way ahead of him, a man going slowly in the same direction that he was. He quickened his pace so as to pass him; but to his surprise the man would not let him pass, and walked alongside of him. He glanced at him out of the corner of his eye, and to his horror, beheld the shining barrel of a revolver peeping at him out of the hollow of the stranger's left arm.

"Not quite so fast," said the stranger. "I can't keep up."

Haley slackened his pace. He had to; he was so weak that he felt like sinking to the ground. This was the last straw; he could see nothing but ruin staring him in the face. He had several hundred dollars on his person, and the loss of it meant much. If he had not been so woefully nervous, he might have planned some resistance; but instead, he gave up in despair.

Suddenly a bright thought occurred to him. He had the coin in his pocket, and here was a chance to get rid of it. To be sure he would lose his money; but he would willingly have given twice the amount to be rid of the coin. The thought was so pleasing that the ghost of a smile played around the corners of his mouth.

"What do you want?" he asked, almost eagerly.

"I want your money and your valuables," was the reply.

"All right," said Haley, diving into his pockets, and pulling forth his wallet with one hand, and the coin with the other.

"No tricks, now," said the highwayman warningly.

"Of course not," said Haley, with a laugh, half hysterical and half exultant.

"Place them in this pocket while I keep you covered," commanded he of the pistol.

Haley pulled the pocket open with one hand, and dropped them in with the other. An ejaculation of surprise escaped him.

"Where did you get that overcoat?" he asked.

"It is none of your concern," tartly answered the highwayman.

"It is, too," said Haley, now laughing so he could hardly talk. "I gave it to you. You are the tramp that gave me the Chinese coin, the 'Curse of Confucius,' and now you have it," and his risibilities so overcame him that he had to lean against a lamp post for support. The highwayman peered closely into his face.

"You are right, friend. I didn't know you, or I would not have robbed you."

"Oh, you can't give it back to me. You have robbed me of it, and now you must keep it until someone steals it from you again!"

The tramp chuckled. "Did it bring you bad luck?" he asked.

Haley then related all that had happened since he had the coin, and ended by saying, "And now you have robbed me of my money, and have once more the curse."

The tramp was now laughing so hard that *he* had to use the lamp post for support. When Haley saw this he grew indignant.

"What cause have *you* to laugh?" he asked. "Weren't my troubles serious? Haven't I had enough trouble? Why should you, who caused me all this trouble, and now have my purse, exult over me? Besides, don't you realize that you once more have the coin, the accursed coin?"

The tramp straightened up; but still continued to chuckle.

"Here is your purse," he said. "We may as well walk toward your home while we talk. I wouldn't rob you of a dollar, for I remember your kindness. You see I still have the coin. There is no more curse in that coin than there is in any other piece of brass. You will remember that we were talking of superstition and luck, and you declared that there was no such thing. I have studied human nature some, and I know that everyone believes in luck, although they will not always admit it. I knew that if you would look for bad luck, you would surely find it; and if you were looking for good luck, you would surely find it. It was only a question of being able to make you look hard enough for it. Bad things as well as good things, happen every day. The pessimist sees all that is bad; the optimist all that is good. I engraved those characters on the coin myself. I copied them from a piece of Chinese paper. I have carried it for years for a pocket piece. Of course it is odd that the old Chinese merchant should drop dead when you asked him about the coin; but I suppose his time had come to die, and why not die while you were there?"

"Then you mean to say, that all these things would have happened, whether I had the coin or not?" asked Haley.

"Certainly," replied the tramp.

"And how about you and your bad luck? Are you forced to do what you did tonight?"

"Yes, and no," replied the tramp, with a bitter smile. "It is in my blood. My father is serving time in prison, my older brother is serving time in prison, and I suppose I will join them sooner or later. I can't lead an honest life no matter how hard I try. It is in the blood — in the blood."

# Cupid Krag-Jorgensen.*

BY BUSHROD C. WASHINGTON, JR.

YES," said Miss Truman.

And that simple word signalized the capitulation of the citadel whose fortifications for two months had been besieged so indefatigably by Lieutenant Payne's forces. The valiant officer thereupon took immediate possession of his prize, and his colors, bright, rosy pink, flashed into view from the battlements in recognition of his courtly salute.

The cart precedes the horse in this instance in order to forestall a very natural inclination on the part of the reader to turn to the finish for assurance that the climax justifies the perusal of the tale. It will presently be seen, however, that, though *what* came about was commonplace enough, *how* it came about was quite a different matter.

Three years before the felicitous conclusion narrated above, the Colonel of the 12th U. S. Calvary and his daughter Carrie, a slender slip of a school-girl, sixteen years old, witnessed a West Point-Annapolis football contest, in company with a tally-ho load of enthusiastic Army partisans. Though a frequent and popular "rooter" at the high school and local college games in and about Washington for two years past, Carrie Truman was now having her first insight into the game as manœuvred by the more celebrated elevens, and, inflamed by the excitement and uproar about her, she waved her Army colors and wriggled in a frenzy of delight as one after another bepadded and bemudded warrior was laid low and borne from the field. One especially brawny young giant, plowing his way recklessly through the "interference" and leading the rushing pack yard after yard toward the Navy goal, drew to himself the plaudits of the Army contingent. The air resounded with hoarse yells of "Payne! Payne!"

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The girl's face beamed with excitement.

"Mary! Mary! It's your brother!" she screamed into an ear just beside her. "My! Isn't he just *beautiful*?"

"Yes, Tommy 's pretty nice," answered Miss Payne matter-of-factly, passing the chocolates. "He'll win the game for us, of course."

Win it he did, and gloriously. There followed the usual frenzied hubbub as the crowd swarmed about the victor-in-chief and bore him, shoulder high, about the campus, sweeping everything before them in a resistless avalanche of irrepressible youth, while the frosty November air was fairly shattered by the triumphant shouts from those lusty lungs.

When at length he managed to break away from them, Payne elbowed his way at once to the tally-ho where his mother and sister were seated, and a moment later, after his begrimed face had been duly kissed, Carrie heard his name and hers deliciously coupled in the customary introductory form, felt her little hand enveloped in an agonizing squeeze, saw the hero quarter-back grinning cheerfully down at her from his dishevelled glory of hair and dust and court-plaster, and the susceptible little lady gazed up worshipfully at this new-created idol and palpitated visibly.

A fair conception of the burden of her vivacious share in the conversation which followed might have been gathered from the amused indulgence in the young cadet's face as he suddenly burst out with the refrain:

> Of course you can *ne—e—ev—er* be like us,
> But try to be as like us as you can!

Miss Truman sighed.

"Oh, indeed I *do* try, Mr. Payne. I've a pretty fair start already, can swim and row and fence and punch the bag like a good fellow! And Daddy has just given me a cute little pistol, too. I'm a — well, just a *little* afraid of it now, but I'll get over that soon, I guess, 'cause I am practising with it every day. And, just think! when we go out to the Post I am to have a *rifle* — p'raps."

The look which was bent on her was tempered with new interest and admiration as he responded:

"Good boy! Miss Truman. A few years of frontier life will

make a man of you. When they turn me out of the Point, I hope I'll be able to run out and see the finished article. I wish you would put a few of those ideas of yours into this soft little sister of mine. I say, Mary!" he called, and the tête-à-tête was at an end.

Prior to Colonel Truman's transfer to the frontier, this chance acquaintance warmed into a lively friendship, carefully and secretly nurtured by Mary Payne, Carrie's classmate and chum-extraordinary at Miss Winters' Seminary in Washington, so that after the Trumans had settled in their new quarters, there ensued a spasmodic correspondence between the two; the young West Pointer's letters full of elder-brotherly fondness and good-fellowship; hers, bright little outbursts of a young heart over-charged with healthy animation and happiness.

> . . . . You can't believe what a jolly relief it is to cut away from Fort Meyer and Miss Winters', and run loose in this scrumptious place. I've just discovered what life is! And to think how narrowly I escaped being roped into society and finally becoming a belle and getting married, and all that. Out here there is some sort of society, of course, but it is such an altogether decent sort that I don't like it one bit. Most of my time is spent in my sporting togs — short skirt and leather leggings and a stunning sombrero — you'd never know your Caddie. And, oh, Tom! I've got my Krag-Jorgensen at last, and I bet I'll shoot like a trooper in no time . . .

Another, of later date: —

> . . . . You're not in my class any more, Tommy, "at all, at all," as Corporal Flynn would say. I'm the real thing now. Yesterday I sallied forth with Daddy and "Fetch," ("Fetch" is my new retriever, if you please; some cheerful idiot called us "Fetch and Carry" the other day, and it has spread like a pestilence all over the Fort) and I killed a coyote with my own little gun — poor thing. Daddy says it was a crackerjack of a shot, but, then, Daddy — . . .

And again: —

> . . . . Last night they shackled me in a horrid long dress, "did up" my hair, and dragged me out to a beastly old BALL. My *début!* It seemed more like my funeral, at first. Imagine the figure I cut, Tom, with my ugly brown skin and awkward hands and feet! I got warmed up to it after a bit, though, and really came near to enjoying myself. If Big Tom had been here, perhaps the enjoyment would have been more complete, for I still think my dear old Tom the nicest thing out. Do you remember — . . .

At this time, for no apparent reason, the correspondence, after a few faint flickers, died out altogether, and two years later, when Thomas Payne, fresh from West Point and still pleasurably conscious of his conspicuously new second lieutenant straps, received

orders to report to Colonel Truman at Fort Sill, there came to him a rush of startled self-reproach as he vaguely recalled to mind a bundle of gushy little letters which a year before had blazed into oblivion in his grate; and from that moment he began to arrange for his new life a program not entirely devoted to his military duties.

"Bless her little heart!" he laughed. "I wonder if she has hurt anything with her Krag-Jorgensen yet," and he looked with new pride at his own sharpshooter's cross. It was very agreeable to this popular, much-flattered man of twenty-four to recall the naive, ardent admiration that had glowed in Carrie Truman's sweet, girlish eyes at sight of him, and he felt an unwonted thrill as he once more opened up the half-forgotten corner of his heart in which the image of his hoydenish little friend had been dormant for two years.

It was in this complaisant frame of mind that he called at the Colonel's home very shortly after reporting at Fort Sill. But when he found himself clasping the hand of a tall Gibsonesque young creature, radiant with fresh charm and beauty from the top of her elaborate coiffure to the train of her rich, tasteful gown; in whose calm, critical survey could he find no trace of past or present approbation, his composure received a wholesome shock, and he gazed at her for one dazed, speechless instant, then subsided into a chair and smiled appreciately at his own wounded vanity.

The conversation, commenced in etiquette's formality, soon assumed a personal basis; in less than ten minutes his frank, merry manner had beaten down her reserve, and presto! two years melted away like morning mist, and during the remainder of the call, which was longer than necessity demanded, they sat cozily on the sofa, chattering after a fashion warranted to atone for lost time.

The young lieutenant being unmated, good to look upon, and independent of his meager salary, was hailed as a welcome acquisition to the social side of Fort Sill. But it soon became noticeable that there were prior claims on his leisure moments. When —or wherever his presence was invited, it usually brought to light the fact that he had been previously engaged by Miss Truman for a canter or a drive or a fencing bout or a turn behind the dogs. With this last, Fort Sill became most familiar. Carrie

Truman had fulfilled her early prophesy, and a more thorough, all-round gym. girl would be difficult to find. To Payne she seemed never so happy — nor so dangerously fascinating — as when, clad in her rough-and-ready hunting suit of khaki, with her gun tucked under her arm, she tramped tirelessly over the surrounding country, bagging every bird that brought its unfortunate head under that steady, unfailing aim. Payne, on his mettle, lost no opportunity to prove his title to the sharpshooter's cross on his breast; and the two, generally under the guidance of an old naturalized German sergeant, spent an incalculable amount of time on these belligerent expeditions, while Fort Sill stood respectfully aside and watched its two most eligible eligibles slip through its fingers. There was no room for doubt as to the end of the romance.

Still, when Payne, with all the trepidation of a brave man before a timid woman, yet with the proud confidence of one who believes his love to be returned, offered her his heart and fortune in one brief, pleading little sentence, she sat down abruptly upon a convenient mound and burst into tears.

"No! No!" she sobbed. "I'm sure I — I never thought of *that*! Oh, Tommy, Tommy, you foolish fellow! Don't love me — please don't! I'm a jolly good companion, perhaps, but I'd be a beastly horrid wife — truly, truly I would. And I never — really I never *thought* of such a thing!" and she sat there, her fowling-piece across her knees, the bag of lifeless birds slung over her shoulder, and looked up at him with the appealing, tear-stained face of a child.

"Not *thought* of it?" he gasped, "Why, my dear girl, you must have known that I love you — I even thought that you — "

"No, no!" she repeated. "It's all a mistake, Tommy, old boy. I'm sure I'm very fond of you, and all that, but — but — oh, do call Sergeant Eickelburger back, and let's go home!" She started to her feet and followed the latter part of her own advice at a brisk clip. Payne swung along beside her. She was very silent, but he followed up this advantage and, with earnest, dogged eloquence, he painted in alluring colors the felicities of a matrimonial career. Arrived at her home, she held out a trembling little hand.

"Tommy, dear, I wish I could!" she said, and turned and left

him. As the door swung to, something prevented its closing. Looking down she discovered the obstacle to be Lieutenant Payne's foot; looking up she encountered the cheery, hopeful face of her undaunted suitor.

"Carrie, one of us is as blind as a bat, and *my* eyesight has always been pretty good. I 'll make you love me if you 'll give me half a show — and mighty soon, too!"

Peering through the curtains after him as he strode away, the girl whispered tremulously,

"Tom, I — I — believe I 'll consult an — oculist!"

Then she ran breathlessly to her room and wrote a twenty-four-page letter to Mary Payne.

The next morning, on his way from guard mount, Payne stopped in at the Trumans'. As Carrie came into the room alone, he stepped bravely forward and gathered her without warning into his arms.

"Yes?" he queried briefly.

"No," replied Miss Truman with dignity. "No!" and she drew away. "That is — " she began, and then melted suddenly, and snuggled beside him on the sofa. "I've thought of the *cutest* way out of it!" she announced, enthusiastically.

"Not out of it — into it, you mean," he expostulated.

"Well, maybe. Now — er — listen! You want me — oh, very much?"

There was a sudden wild fire in his eyes and his hand crushed hers painfully. She hurried on, in trepidation.

"Then you must win me! — *win* me! I s'pose I'm worth it?"

Payne trembled on the verge of a calamity. This squeezable bundle of sweet femininity within such tempting reach, the arch brown eyes so close to his, the full warm lips, throbbing with unkissed kisses — his arms ached with longing, but he only exclaimed bluntly:

"Well, by George! What else have I been trying to do for the past two months?"

Then was unfolded a plan which brought all his sporting proclivities to the front and kindled in him an enthusiasm equal to her own. Nothing less than a rifle match, with Miss Carolyne Truman as the stake!

"Won't it be larks, Tom? We'll have ten shots each, at two hundred yards, off-hand. If I win, or we tie, you mustn't even so much as whisper a word of — love — for a year. If you win — why then — I — why, I — lose! That is —" Her blushes finished the sentence for her.

"Oh, I'll win all right!" he answered.

"Of course no one must know. We'll wait till Daddy and the troop are off on a practice march. You remain in, and we'll have a clear field, with only old Sergeant Eickelburger to manage the targets."

"Good scheme! We'll call it a bargain."

The opportunity arrived a few days later, and, accompanied only by the sergeant, the pair hurried guiltily to the deserted rifle range. The sky was a deep, unblemished turquoise, the last fluffy little cloud was just melting into oblivion on the horizon, the pennants which the sergeant had placed to show the direction of the wind hung listlessly from their staffs. To Carrie Truman it seemed that all nature was awaiting the result of that match with the same breathless suspense that was quickening her heart-beats and dangerously unsteadying her fingers. She glanced furtively at Tom. In all the magnificence of his six feet two he towered beside her, steady and confident, it seemed; but as he turned to her she noted the nervous twitching of his lips and he held up for her inspection a hand whose trembling, though jestingly exaggerated, was not entirely feigned.

"You'll walk away with the score," he gloomily declared, and the whole story of his love and longing was written in the pleading brown eyes. The lieutenant's nerve was obviously waning.

Meanwhile the sergeant set the danger flags, unhoused the target frames, and pasted thereon two fresh paper targets. Lieutenant Payne won the toss for first shot, and Eickelburger disappeared behind the butts.

The instant the young soldier felt the pressure of the rifle stock against his shoulder, and crooked his finger familiarly and eagerly on the trigger, the cool touch seemed to soothe the panicky leaping of his heart, and the first shot sped unerringly to the head of the target figure. As it descended behind the butts a white disk appeared in its place. Almost instantly another shot rang out,

and a five was recorded to Miss Truman's credit. She flashed on him a bright look of exultation.

"Neck and neck, Tom! Oh, this is *great!*" she exclaimed.

His sporting blood was up, and his answer was a terse

"Immense!"

Sixteen shots followed with monotonous regularity; sixteen times more the white disk appeared above the rifle butts. Then came a long, breathless pause.

"Cupid, Cupid!" cried Payne, melodramatically, "your aim is good; send this last shot home!" Raising his rifle he fired in quick desperation — and scored his tenth head-shot. He pressed his hand to his forehead as though to crush back that rapturous, stifling throb of hope, — and so did not catch the new expression just dawning in the beautiful eyes gazing at him so wistfully.

"You — you've scored fifty," she faltered in a queer, muffled little voice.

There was no look — no answer. Ah! the pity of it, that he should not see what a sweet, winsome picture she made as she stood blushing, hesitating before this great crisis in her life. The hesitation was but an instant. Another white disk would mean a tie — and a whole year of silence. In behalf of this possibility rose a world of pride and ambition; but, beating against it, a young, true heart full of new-awakened love. Summoning all her skill, she took aim for the last shot, and as her keen, steady eye glanced along the dull blue barrel, she aimed deliberately *below* the head of the target soldier — and the bullet sped.

The sergeant pulled down the target and, from force of habit, had nearly displayed the customary signal, when he stopped in dismay and examined the last bullet mark.

"*Lieber Gott!* She vos done missed der head py so mooch as a hair!" he muttered. "Mine poor leetle Colonel's daughter! Py Himmel! I'll h'ist oup der fife score, und led der leetle fräulein not loose! She vos so proud mit dot Krag-Jorgensen!"

Once again the fateful white marker was started on its way up, when something tugged at the old fellow's conscience.

"T'under! Do I four enlisdments serve mit honor, und den go traitor?" he demanded angrily, and a clear red disk rose into

sight and flashed forth its little message of rosy promise to the two eager, tremulous young contestants.

A quick, gasping breath of wonder, then —

"Carrie!" he cried, drawing her to him. And —

"Yes!" said Miss Truman.

Sergeant Eickelburger waited long and patiently for the lieutenant to order him to close the range at the end of the match, but the order never came. When he finally came from behind the butts to investigate, he saw the pair walking toward him. The girl's cheek was flushed and traces of recent tears still clung about her drooping lashes.

"It vos a peety, Miss, you loose der match," he said sympathizingly.

To his amazement he was answered by a sudden, happy laugh.

"Did I lose it?" she asked vaguely.

"Old fellow," exclaimed the lieutenant quizzically, "don't talk of trifles. She has just led me to believe that the match she lost is nothing to the one she has made!"

"Now you maybe make fun mit me, perhaps!" said the puzzled German, scratching his head.

In a corner of Lieutenant Payne's new, prettily appointed library hang two Krag-Jorgensen rifles, crossed, and draped with the silk pennant of troop C, 12th U. S. Cavalry. Under this triumphal arch poses Cupid in oils, the handiwork of the lieutenant's pretty wife. The little god is smartly rigged out in a uniform of khaki, with a rifle over his shoulder and a comically warlike expression on his chubby face. Beneath him is the inscription:

"CUPID KRAG-JORGENSEN."

# A Rule That Worked Both Ways.*

BY OCTAVIA ZOLLICOFFER BOND.

AT each flight ascended in the New Orleans hotel her low spirits sank another degree. The all-pervading air of luxury was rasping to nerves still smarting from the triple blow of fate by which Mrs. Adéle Lanier had been bereft at once of husband, home and fortune. Only an imperative summons could have dragged her from the obscure side street lodging to air the cheapest of mourning in view of exquisitely gowned Northern women and interestingly typical Southern men who now thronged the St. Charles on the eve of the Mardi Gras.

But her husband's old Creole friend, Madame, was ever dictatorial, and in this instance the "something to your advantage" cleverly inserted in the perfumed note piqued curiosity, excited hope, and lent force to the closing command, "Come to the roof-garden this afternoon at 4.30 without fail."

There, at the appointed moment, the poorly dressed young widow faced a bewildering array of feminine loveliness loitering, to music that came from somewhere, amid the palms and sweet olives which crowned the top floor. Threading her way among tropical foliage, past parties of fortunate men and women sipping cool beverages with the leisure of the sheltered class, she reached the remote and roomy wicker-chair in which Madame lolled at ease. Almost before she was seated, a bald business proposition was thrust upon her inexperience with the abruptness peculiar to the elderly Creole. Would Adéle consent to live in Madame's house in the "Garden District," which all the world knows is a superb specimen of old régime architecture. "Come, yes or no, without quibble," was demanded. She was asked, moreover, to consider that it was "the old family residence, completely fur-

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nished, rent free, observe," as long as she chose to occupy it — on certain conditions. She must bind herself to remain in the house not less than twelve months from the day of taking possession, and Madame's recluse brother, Professor Paul Xavier, must be allowed to retain his room and his laboratory, with board and lodging free of charge. Without doubt it was liberal? declared Madame, with a rising inflection; and boarders, if desired, might easily be secured to fill the roomy mansion, was tentatively suggested, while Mrs. Lanier gasped for breath, trying to assure herself that the good luck was real and not a dream. Meanwhile, the elder woman continued to offer needless arguments, urging that Prof. Xavier, who devoted his time and his large income solely to scientific pursuits, was quiet and gave no trouble. He was eccentric (that could not be denied), but on the other hand he was not the sort of person to excite reasonable scruples in an unmarried hostess, though she were a mere chit of a widow with great eyes and marvelous skin (punctuating with fan taps that were half caress, half rebuke). He was quite forty, was Paul, and looked all of fifty in his scholarly skull cap and loose alpaca coat, and gave not the second thought to a woman. As to location — but all locations suffer by time; and for its nearness to the cemetery, a sensible person should not care *that* (with a snap of the jewelled fingers).

Mrs. Lanier neither heard the inducements nor heeded the drawbacks. From the beginning of her misfortunes, two years ago, her mind had stood ready made up to release herself from distressing poverty by whatever honest work came to hand, without waiting for a spectacular deliverance. And now that the opportunity was offered for her to do the one thing she thoroughly knew how, in making an agreeable home for others to enjoy, her acceptance was as prompt as utter surprise would permit. She was quite ready, when pen and ink had been brought, to sign the legally drafted contract which Madame's business foresight had provided.

By the time Mrs. Lanier had risen from the interview the elasticity of youth, relieved of anxious tension, had asserted itself in the return of the depressed lip lines to normal curves, while hope shone again in every feature. With head lifted from the passing

storm, she looked with new, appropriating interest on the gay crowd, as who should say, "These, or such as these, are my future patrons." No vain boast, inasmuch as, through the kind aid of the hotel clerk, the old mansion in the "Garden District" was, within a fortnight, filled with the overflow of guests from the St. Charles.

"It all happened like something in a book. It is really too good to be true," confided the newly ensconced landlady to sundry relatives and friends, who merely stared at her in reply with lifted brows, not caring to express the surprise they certainly felt that "even poor, unsophisticated Del should be so easily roped in by that cunning old Madame, who has not been able to hold a tenant for her house longer than a week at a time these ten years past. It was left for the Lanier kin to bluntly tell her she was thought by every one to have taken leave of her senses when she bound herself to live twelve months in a house that was notoriously haunted, a house in which the original owner had witnessed from a window the drowning of his two sons, and in which his successor had been decapitated on his own back porch, not to mention the young girl who had been frightened to death by suddenly facing an intruder in the grounds at dusk.

"However," said the "in-laws," with the ingenious cruelty which is their gift, "when a widow is crazy to 'set out,' and sees a chance to do so by taking boarders, nothing will stop her. As to the boarders, though," was suavely supplemented, "they will not be apt to stay."

And the boarders did not stay, notwithstanding their openly expressed delight with the place from the moment of sounding the quaint brass gong at the gate which admitted them to the riot of April roses in progress around the sun dial within the high enclosure. True, they were equally enraptured with the antique mahogany in the thick-walled apartments, and appreciated, to the verge of bad form, the distinctly Southern flavor of the six o'clock dinners and late breakfasts à la creole, some going so far in approval as to ask on the very first day if Mrs. Lanier would let them stay on all summer, "so sure to be cool here with this delicious gulf breeze coming through the wide casements;" or *could* she be induced to "make room for dear cousin Serena — a most

delightful person," etc., etc. Yet the lapse of twenty-four hours generally made a difference, in all save full enjoyment of the French cookery and ample justice done the large claret pitchers that flanked the savory dishes. On the second day, complaint was usually made that something was wrong with the bedroom lock. The door, it was claimed, was liable to swing open at the most unexpected times. At the third breakfast, the same guest, pale and wan, would ask if others in the house had heard peculiar rustling noises late in the night, or had been disturbed by some one entering the room without taking the trouble to open the door. Another day, at latest, and the guest was gone. Though the vacancies were filled immediately, with equal promptness the new comers left. By the end of April the house was deserted except for the recluse scientist and one other gentleman — a well-known New Yorker of means who had come to stay "only one quiet week away from the crowd," and had remained a month, with no present indication of a wish to depart.

It was at breakfast on the first day of May that Mrs. Lanier informed her two remaining boarders that she had notified Madame of her intention to give up the house at once.

"You see how it is," she said, brokenly. "I blame no one for leaving. What I have myself experienced in this dreadful house is enough to turn the hair gray." In an agony of long-suppressed confession she continued, "I have tried hard, *so* hard to stay; there is nothing for me elsewhere; but when, time after time, one sees a headless old man at midnight roaming the halls and walking straight out of the closed window to the cemetery, or is wakened suddenly by a woman draped in white bending over one's pillow, it is impossible to be brave."

In singular silence the two men heard. Prof. Paul Xavier ate fast, his eyes fastened on his plate, while the eyes of the other were fixed on him. Once or twice the New Yorker's lips parted quickly, as if about to speak, then closed firmly, as though determined to be silent. With evident effort he kept his seat until the scientist left the table, when he also rose and followed to the laboratory. The ominously heavy tread which closely tracked Prof. Paul only reached his inattentive ears as an echo after the door was closed behind both men, and the stooped little student

was confronted in his own apartment by the tall, severe-looking man from New York, who looked at him a full minute without speaking, then, through set teeth, slowly measured out the words: "This deviltry has to stop. I've watched your game."

The answer was as surprising as it was ready: "What a pity that Monsieur should be premature. Another day, and the experiments had been completed, the result an open secret."

"You admit your guilt, then," cried his accuser. "You acknowledge yourself the author of the mysterious sights and sounds which have vacated this house of its tenants?"

"But, yes, since Monsieur has made the discovery," was the unabashed reply.

"How dare you!" angrily retorted the New Yorker, in whom intense feeling was getting the better of self-command. "How dare you, with your diabolical, charlatan tricks to ruin the business of an estimable, a *loveable* woman, and drive her from her only refuge again into the cold, pitiless world."

"I assure you, Monsieur," replied Professor Paul, "it is the furthest from my wish to drive the dear lady from this house. I would have her here always remain. To that end I work day and night. Allow me to demonstrate. It will not take one half hour, by aid of the electric transformer and the radium specimens, to convince a gentleman of Monsieur's intelligence that it is a natural, a legitimate operation, the materializing of spirits. Well has it lately been said that 'the day when people evinced their intellectuality by scouting at ghosts is gone. In this epoch of wireless telegraphy, X-rays and radium, unbelief is almost presumptuous. There is opening a world of knowledge concerning the life of the spirit as full of wonders as the world of nature which the last century has opened to men's minds.' Believing this, Monsieur, and availing myself of modern appliances, I have solved a great problem. I have succeeded in rendering apparent to the natural eye the ordinarily invisible spiritual bodies which are everywhere about us."

Waxing fluent in the familiar terms of science, the usually silent student proceeded to explain, saying:

"It is a recent scientific axiom that all matter is capable of resolving itself into ether. Therefore, the supposition is reason-

able that all etherialized matter may, under special conditions, resume its original form. Experimenting along this line, Monsieur, I have at last been able to identify, as the rarified elements of human bodies, certain hitherto unknown rays which reach the earth from interplanetary space, and which are so constituted as to pass freely through air, ether and all solid bodies except radium. By the aid of the latter substance, these rays have been concentrated by me, and revealed to the eye in their primal forms which, as I have already indicated, are the spirit shapes of human beings who have passed through death. Monsieur has not been under this roof four weeks without being able to testify that he himself has seen the dead walk. To prove the theory to the satisfaction of the most incredulous it only remains to make the rule work both ways. Without doubt that is possible. Since substances as imponderable as helium may be reduced to visible form, the reverse must also be true. One more day, and I should have been prepared to state positively that living flesh forms, electrically charged with radium, will swiftly pass into helium. If these solid bodies of ours can thus be made to pass quickly into impalpable elements, then the old, old question as to the possibility of the spontaneous combustion of the human body is settled in the affirmative. The rule will have worked both ways. I have only to ascertain the exact tension required to render one's body transmutable, before announcing the discovery to the world. It is a discovery to bring wealth and fame to the discoverer, and enable him to give his hand in marriage to the one woman on earth who has enchained this heart," cried the wizened little man, slapping the left alpaca lapel with five yellow, shrivelled fingers, "for, let me whisper to Monsieur, there is one other discovery greater yet than all," he continued, distorting his wrinkled face with amazing leers.

"On the 18th of last month I learned that love and electricity, these two forces, shall eventually subdue creation. And now I am free to lead to the altar the adorable Adéle Lanier."

"Not with my consent, you fool," ejaculated his impatient auditor. "This morning's mail will bring to Mrs. Lanier's hand a declaration from me which I trust will make your intentions superfluous. I had not the courage to speak, yet you have the

effrontery to count her acceptance of you as a foregone conclusion!"

"Sir!" hissed Prof. Paul, "it is an unfair advantage that Monsieur has taken. I, too, shall write. The morning's mail will bring to her the offer also of my heart and hand with all the wealth and fame that shall be mine from the result of the rule that works both ways. Unlike Monsieur, I shall not be so rude as to ask the written or spoken reply. A rose, placed by her fair hand upon my plate at luncheon, shall suffice to assure me that my suit is acceptable."

"Failing the rose?" cynically suggested his rival.

"Impossible, Monsieur! But stay. Failing the rose, I pledge myself to no longer trouble the lady or Monsieur or any one else in this disappointing world."

. . . . . .

When the two boarders entered the dining room at noon the young widow Lanier sat, blushing furiously, at the head of a table whereon flowers were conspicuously absent. The creole sank dejectedly into his usual seat on her left, staring blankly at his plate. Then, with a sudden impulse of hope, lifting it gingerly, to find underneath only the cloth. While he was so engaged, the hostess extended her right hand, which had been hidden in her lap, and dropped from slightly trembling fingers a long-stemmed white rose upon the plate of his rival, opposite. Livid with emotion, the disappointed suitor bounded from his seat, and tore out of the room, thus removing the only hindrance to a charming tableau à deux, which followed immediately upon his exit.

Presently the gong clanged furiously at the gate. Hostess and guest had scarcely regained composure before Madame burst in upon them. "What folly is this?" she cried, fluttering Adéle's note derisively. "Apparitions, noises, bah!"

Meanwhile, Professor Xavier had returned. As he advanced into the room he trailed after him two long, insulated wires, and pressed to his head the open mouth of a small glass jar in which glowed a minute, strange substance.

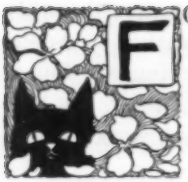
Madame's tirade was in full swing when, glancing at her brother, her incomplete sentence ended in a wild shriek. All three gazed on the scientist, appalled at the spectacle he pre-

sented. First headless, then trunkless, armless, formless, he was fast disappearing from view. Before they could collect their senses and rush to the rescue, he had vanished altogether, in an incredible manner, leaving no trace behind, unless it were the slightly scorched mark on the rug where he had stood.

Completely unnerved by the shock, Madame was long ill, and had not the spirit, when she finally recovered, to contest the will, dated April 18th, by which her brother had bequeathed to Adéle Lanier his entire estate. Not another scrap of writing was found in the vanished scientists' laboratory. With himself he had chosen to let perish all knowledge of the rule that worked both ways.

# When the Laurel Blooms.*

BY LEWIS FRANCIS HANES.



FOUR years have come and gone — four years to a day — since I first saw her coming up that little path. Yet the picture is as fresh as a thing of yesterday.

A runner had passed down the valley early that morning telling of trouble among the Indians west of the Blue Ridge, and the scattered families were gathering into our little fort, knowing but too well the meaning of such a message.

It was a perfect day, as perfect as the gift it brought me. The sky was as blue as forget-me-nots, and the air was full of the drowsy notes of spring and the spicy odor of muscadine. Everything was fresh and sweet, and everywhere was peace. A bird was singing to its mate in the brush near by, and the low, sweet notes stealing softly into my heart warmed it with a strange, sweet joy.

It was then I saw her with the full glory of the sunshine about her. Stopping here and there to pluck a flower scarce sweeter than herself, she came slowly toward me, now burying her face deep in their crimson beauty, now holding them high above her head and dancing an airy step as gracefully as a fawn.

I loved her then. I shall love her always. But when I thought to tell her so —

"No flower was ever so pretty as that one over there. That tiny little one. I don't believe you see it."

And what could I do but prove that I did; or no bird ever sang so sweetly as the one whose voice fell on our ears, softly, like the notes of a silver chime. And I could but still my own tongue and listen, for a little hand whose lightest gesture was my law commanded silence.

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And so the days drifted by and passed into weeks, and the weeks into months, and still the danger from beyond the blue hills threatened.

Patiently I watched and waited for the hour I knew would come, for I had seen a light in her soft gray eyes that stilled the wild restlessness in my heart. But morning, noontime and night came and went till summer and autumn passed and winter's hand lay heavy on the hills.

Then came a day, and another, and another, when dangers were as thick about us as dead leaves in the forest. Days filled with sterner work than the telling of lovers' tales. But they, too, had an end. And when it was over she came and shyly laid her hand in mine, and I knew that my hour had come.

I told her then plainly as a plain man should that I had naught to offer her but my rifle, a rude cabin for a home, and a love that knew no bounds. Would she take these?

"When the laurel blooms you shall know," she answered with her old waywardness, but never another word, tease as I might.

The world lay under a mantle of white then, and I was never a patient man. But at last the days came when the winds blew warm from the south. The deepest and shadiest nook in the mountains gave up its treasure of snow, and hastened to don the robes summer offered. All through the forest the myriad faces of the arbutus twinkled like a starry carpet, and the azalea buds showed just a dream of a flame. Winter had passed. Springtime had come. Everything was springing into life, and each swelling bud sent a thrill of joy racing with the red blood through my heart.

"When the laurel blooms," she said, and I knew a spot where the sun lay warm on the cliffs all day coaxing the flowers into early bloom. And there I showed her a clump of half-blown buds. "To-morrow they will be in bloom," I said, "and then — "

When the east had crimsoned with the first touch of the rising sun I went out through the dewdrops, scattering them in showers at every step and wishing each one a jewel that I might weave them into a necklace fit to coil about her throat. The air was heavy with the scent of sweet buds and full of bird songs to which my heart kept time. It was as light as the downy mist lying so

softly over the earth, for, I thought, the laurel blooms to-day. And so I found my buds of yesterday gleaming like a star against the granite background, full blown and nodding lazily in a gentle breeze.

I was a man grown, and to get that cluster of beauty I must needs be one. It was a man's task, and a fool's errand, I thought with a smile. But I had waited long for it, and laying aside hunting coat and rifle I was preparing for the climb, when the tall form of an Indian stepped out on the narrow ledge. Catching sight of the swaying blossoms he stooped and snapped the slender stem. As he held them, tenderly, I would have sworn, one level ray of the just risen sun flashed full upon them, revealing the fulness of their fragile beauty.

Long he held them thus, and gazed and gazed till I wondered if they brought before his eyes, also, the vision of some soft-eyed Swannanoa awaiting his home coming, perhaps at that very moment, beside the swirling waters of the Yonahlassee.

Whatever it was absorbed him. He seemed lost to every earthly thing, and how long he would have continued to stand as still and silent as the hills, I know not. But suddenly the twanging snap of a bowstring cut through the silence. A flash of tawny light hissed through the air, and the feathered shaft of an arrow showed against the dark bronze of his bosom. For a single moment the tall form stood without the quiver of a muscle, then straightened to its full height, and the deep-throated war cry of the Cherokees rang through the gorge, a challenge to his hidden foe.

As the last faint echo died away into silence the strong arms dropped slowly to his side, the proud head drooped, and I instinctively stretched out my hands to steady the swaying figure. A gasp, a shudder, and, tottering to the edge of the precipice, he fell almost at my feet. Waiting a moment for that lurking death to pass I gathered up the bruised and shattered blossoms, and stole softly away, breathing a prayer to the Great Spirit to comfort the desolate maiden beside the "Singing Water."

# Look to Your FOOD

Too much **STARCH** (in form of white bread, undercooked potatoes, etc.) **PASTE** (half-cooked cereals, soggy vegetables, etc.) **GREASE** (over-fat meats, fried foods, etc.) **COFFEE** (with its dangerous Caffein, etc.) these elements that make up the diet cause nine-tenths of human ails and only by change to proper food can these ails be cured. So long as the cause is there the effect will remain although, of course, you may cover it with medicine for a time.

Cut out the pasty, soggy, greasy, starchy foods, and tea and coffee, and get back to a natural diet, don't over-eat, be sure to chew your food thoroughly, some exercise, plenty fresh air, and soon all the joys of living will come back again, for you know there's no feeling in all the world half so fascinating as the glow of returning health, strength and vigor.

How?

Try this 10 days and note how much stronger yon will feel in Body and Brain — keener, brighter and fit to keep up in the life race.

BREAKFAST of, say A Little Fruit, Saucer of GRAPE-NUTS and Cream,
A Little Toast, A Soft Cooked Egg or Two, A Cup of Postum

in place of tea or coffee. Surprising how far you can go on this simple meal yet be strong and feel well fed for the reason that **all the food elements are there.**

LUNCH on the same and no more till the evening meal.

Make DINNER the hearty meal, such meat as you prefer (some can't eat pork), good wholesome vegetables well cooked but not soggy, whole wheat bread or toast, dessert from some one of the GRAPE-NUTS recipes, (book in each pkg.).

This diet will put you on your feet again and for a sound scientific reason.

There is no charm like the glow of returning health; 10 days of the GRAPE-NUTS diet will prove it.

Get the little book, "The Road to Wellville," in each pkg.